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PROTECTED SPECIES SURVEY

REGENT HOUSE

REGENT STREET

WREXHAM

FOR

Atmore Developments Ltd

10th December 2016

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1. INTRODUCTION

A preliminary protected species survey (bat and bird) was undertaken on the 9th December 2016. The survey was carried out by David Bennett, a licensed and experienced bat surveyor and ecologist (Natural Resource Wales & Natural England licenses) following a request by the current owner of the property. The survey was requested to satisfy planning requirements in respect of any protected species issues for an office building known as Regent House, Regent Street, Wrexham, North Wales. A planning consent is being sought to permit a change of use from office to residential use.

2. BAT BIOLOGY

There are now 17 species of bat (breeding) in the UK, many of which can be found within this part of Wales. Each bat gives birth just once a year, early in summer, the females tending to gather together in a communal roost to give birth and bring up their young. This is the time when they are most likely to use buildings. By the end of the summer the roosts are often vacated for other more suitable hibernation sites such as caves, mines or trees. Hibernation sites are usually characterised by stable temperatures with a high level of humidity. When temperatures fall and food becomes scarce they hibernate and live off body fat stored during the autumn. During mild winters bats can still often be seen on an evening flying and looking for food. Bats use a variety of different structures for the purposes of roosting, these can include mature trees, caves, mines, buildings (old and new), bridges and tunnels.

Bats will generally cause no harm to buildings or the people that occupy the buildings. They can be very discreet and are often not noticed because of their preference to occupy tiny spaces, cracks and crevices in roof voids. Some species such as the brown long eared bat will utilise open loft areas for flying and moving around in. They will roost on bare exposed timber beams, typically beneath the ridge beam. The droppings produced are harmless (largely made up of insect fragments) and do not carry any disease although a very large roost can sometimes produce large quantities of droppings.

3. LEGISLATION

All of our species of domestic bat are protected under both UK and European legislation. In the UK they are listed under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994. The Habitats Directive has recently been superseded by The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 which came into force on the 1st April 2010

To summarise it is illegal not only to intentionally kill, injure or take any bat but also too recklessly or intentionally damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a bat uses for shelter or protection, or to disturb a bat while it is occupying such a place. A roost is protected whether or not bats are present at the time. The reason for this is that bats have a tendency to remain loyal to certain roost sites, often over a long period of time.

The presence of a species protected under European or UK legislation is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal which, if carried out would be likely to result in disturbance or harm to the species or its habitat. Section 74 (2) of the CroW Act 2000 (now updated by Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006 requires the publication of lists of habitats and species that are of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biological diversity. The list is regularly changed and updated and many bat species appear on it. NERC consolidates the requirements of the CroW Act in placing duties upon government agencies, including local authorities, to ensure the conservation of Biodiversity.

4. AIMS

The aims of the survey were:

1. To describe any evidence of protected species in the study area.
2. To assess the impact of converting the building from office to residential.
3. To suggest mitigation measures as appropriate.

5. STUDY AREA

The property is located within a town centre location with houses, offices and shops immediately adjacent to the site. The building faces the main road and there is a tarmac car park at the rear, the area is well lit from streetlights.

The four storey building appears to be constructed from a steel frame with brick and block infill walls and a flat concrete roof covered with felt. There is a section at the rear which supports the lift shaft, there is also a small flat roof section at the rear facing the car park.

The site plan is shown in Appendix 1 and the photos are shown in Appendix 2.

6. METHODOLOGY

The building was subjected to an internal and external survey on the 9th December 2016, the weather conditions were dry and clear. As much of the building as possible was searched (health and safety and access permitting) using a Cluson rechargeable lamp, a Seesnake endoscope (paying particular attention to the roof sections, ledges and any gaps or cavities). A search was made for bat droppings, staining, odour, old skeletons and feeding signs (such as wing casings etc). Other evidence such as bird's nests and other signs of nesting birds was also looked for both internally and externally.

7. RESULTS

No evidence of bats was found anywhere inside or outside of the building, no droppings, feeding remains, markings etc. The upper flat roof area can be inspected using the inspection hatch within the upper storey. This section also includes the boiler room and the water tank for the building.

All of the upper roof area to include any fascia sections are well sealed with no potential areas which could be used by bats. The boiler room has a louvre window for ventilation purposes. Internally there is a mesh grill covering the window although there is one small section missing. There is no evidence to suggest that bats have accessed this part of the building.

At ground level and to the rear of the building there is another small plant room which also has a louvre doorway. This does not have a mesh grill fitted to it but it showed no signs of use by bats. It is a small area with relatively high levels of natural light and it is not really suitable.

At the front of the building and on most levels there are some small cavity gaps in the lower course facing brickwork, some examples of these have been shown in the photos below. If deep enough some of these may offer opportunities for individual roosting bats on an occasional basis.

The overall potential for this building to support bats at the present time is low and no further survey work is thought to be necessary as long as the building is retained and not demolished.

8. CONCLUSIONS, IMPACTS AND MITIGATION FOR BATS

No evidence of bats or use by bats was found anywhere within the building. It therefore appears that there are no apparent issues to the proposed conversion/change of use in respect of bats at the present time. As outlined above it is often difficult to inspect every crevice or hidden section in a building (due to access or health and safety issues). In addition bats tend to be nomadic, which reduces the chances of finding bats on one or even several visits. This situation arises frequently when carrying out this type of survey. However, the survey has been completed to a good standard and it is not anticipated that any problems will occur. Carrying out the survey also puts in place demonstrable safeguards regarding the avoidance of illegal activities.

As a general note, most buildings offer potential for over-wintering and seasonal occupancy for individual bats. This use can be sporadic during the season and actual presence through emergence surveys cannot be fully confirmed. It is therefore recommended that the following precautionary recommendations should be undertaken as good working practice during the conversion phase.

- **Ensure all gaps within the facing brickwork are retained as existing.**
- **If required, door and window frames should be removed with care to ensure that no roosting, torpid or hibernating bats are injured during the proposed works.**
- **Any structural members, lintel bearings, purlins or wall plates should be removed with care to ensure that no roosting, torpid or hibernating bats are injured during the construction process.**
- **In the unlikely event that bats were found during the construction period then all work should cease and Natural Resource Wales (Buckley office) and/or a licensed bat worker should be contacted for further advice.**

9. NESTING BIRDS

No evidence of nesting birds was found anywhere within the structure of the property. The large open flat roof may offer some potential nest sites for gulls but there was no evidence to show that it has been used.

All breeding birds are protected under Section 1(1) and 1(2) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended. This makes it an offence to damage, disturb, or obstruct access to nests during the bird breeding season (generally March to September).

10. REFERENCES

BCT 2016 Good Practice Guidelines 2nd Edition 2016 BCT

Joint Nature Conservation Committee 2004 *Bat Workers Manual* JNCC Peterborough

Appendix 1 – Site plan



Appendix 2 – Site Photos

1. Front elevation



2. Front elevation



3. Side elevation



4. Rear elevation with lift tower



5. Small flat roof section at the rear



6. The upper flat roof area



7. The top of lift shaft tower which also houses the boiler room



8. Missing grill section in the boiler room



9. Edges of the flat roof are sealed



10. Brick gap example



11. Brick gap examples



12. Further brick gap examples

